



SNEAK PREVIEW

by Mark O. Steele

I WAS warned before I started, but good. McNeil handed it to me, as plainly as the English language allows, across Sarco's body lying on the morgue slab.

He was matter-of-fact about it, but definite. "It's possible, Mr. Henderson, just possible, that you might lose your own life," he said.

So I was warned; so I bulled

ahead anyway.

I guess one part of it was an urge to come to grips, just once, with something real, something besides the imaginary perils and problems of the shadow-people New World Films pays me six figures per annum to stipple onto their raw film-stock. That, and the chance to latch on to a ready-made, real life

Based on a radio script originally written for the CBS radio program *Suspense*.

By ROBERT L. RICHARDS

story—plus a couple of unanswered questions in my own mind, after I saw the body.

Could be a little of it was McNeil's fault for ribbing me about the hat-band gimmick, too. Anyway . . .

I'd come East for the New York premiere of 'MARKED DECK', my new picture. The trade reviews were ecstatic and both Louella and Hedda had been more than nice and it looked like the New York critics would fall into line. I was feeling wonderful as the lights came on and the crowd started for the exits and I heard the comments all around me, like "Henderson's got another winner, I guess" and "That makes three smashes in a row, now" and "The guy's got to do a stinker sometime—but this ain't it".

It was like that, and I was feeling very mellow as the big, blonde fellow spoke to me in the foyer. He was a big man, as I say, a quiet, well dressed guy with the signature of good schools in his speech and the workmanship of good tailors in his clothes.

"I'm McNeil of the homicide division, Mr. Henderson," he said, smiling. "May I take the liberty of telling you how much I enjoyed the picture?"

"Captain Charles McNeil?"

There's only one Captain McNeil in police work for whodunit aficionados. I grabbed his hand and pumped it. "Well, Captain, this is really a pleasure!"

"The pleasure is all mine, I assure you, Mr. Henderson. Matter of

fact, I more or less laid in wait for you out here. When I heard that my favorite director was in the audience tonight, I just couldn't resist meeting you. I think I've seen every picture you ever made."

"Look," I said, "why don't we get out of here and go some place? I want to talk to you."

"And I want to talk to *you*. Say—would you like to come down to headquarters with me? There are a few things there that might interest you."

A couple of hours and three high-balls later we were buddies. We were in McNeil's office and I'd been telling him how Hollywood makes whodunits.

"You know, Mr. Henderson," he said, "you'd have made a first-class professional detective." I was smiling fatuously at that and what followed, when he stuck it into me.

"I've followed the reasoning in your pictures with complete agreement," he went on.

"Very kind of you," I mumbled. "With one exception."

I could see that something was coming. "Such as?"

"Your 'MURDER IN THE MORNING'. You remember, the killer has the detective and a friend of the detective at his mercy in a hotel room?" I nodded. "The friend is about to leave—he's helpless anyway, *unless*—and here's the point—*unless* the detective is able to convey a certain piece of vital information to his friend *in the presence* of the killer, but without his

knowledge . . . remember?"

"Sure I remember," I said. "As the friend leaves, our detective hands him his hat—with a piece of paper containing the information slipped into the sweat-band. So?"

"Well, I disagree. I realize it probably wasn't your fault—the writer or the producer, no doubt . . ."

"Matter of fact," I said, "it was my own idea."

"I see. Well, if you'll forgive me, it's too simple, too unimaginative. No smart criminal would allow a thing like that to happen right under his nose."

"But the way it was done—" I began, but he went on:

"And how would the friend know the paper is under the sweat-band? You don't look under your hat-band every time you put on your hat." He smiled kindly. "A professional wouldn't be taken in for a minute by something like that. By and large, however, your shows are models of clear, rational reasoning. What's the next one going to be?"

"Well," I said, "I want to try something different. I want to open with a man—a criminal—dead on a slab in the morgue. Just another plugged thug. But how did he get there? Where did the long trail start that ended on the slab? What were its turnings and wanderings?"

He'd been listening intently. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "Excuse me." Keeping his eyes on me, he picked up his telephone and asked a question, listened a minute, and hung up.

"Suppose I write the first scene in your new picture, here and now," he said, turning to me with an odd smile. "Mr. Henderson, have you ever seen an actual—murderer?"

I felt a little like a school kid. "You're making me feel like an amateur, Captain. Actually, I haven't."

"You're about to," he said grimly. We went down a long, white hallway, down three or four flights of spiral iron stairs into what seemed to be a basement. McNeil opened a door.

The smell of formaldehyde crisped in my nostrils. I could sense McNeil grinning beside me as I hesitated on the threshold.

"Step inside, Mr. Henderson," he said pleasantly. "This is no movie." He led the way between the concrete blocks, each topped by its white, shrouded shape. He stopped beside one of them and turned down the sheet.

The strong, fluorescent tubes above the body brought out the death pallor under brown, swarthy skin. The man might have been forty or forty-five years old. I would have picked him for an Italian or a Greek.

"Well, there you are," McNeil was saying. "Gregory Sarco, spy, murderer, drug addict and about everything else in the book."

There were no marks of violence visible on the body.

"How did he die?" I asked.

"Shot in the back. We found him in Central Park."

"Know who killed him?"

McNeil shrugged and spread his hands eloquently. "Plenty of people had good reason to."

"Find anything on him?"

"A few things. Bankbook. wallet, so on."

"That all?"

"Not quite. A little money, a handkerchief, a tin of aspirin . . ."

"You're sure it was aspirin?"

McNeil was amused. "We professionals may not be very romantic, Mr. Henderson, but we *are* thorough—yes, it was aspirin. Well, there's your first scene. Now all you need is the rest of the picture."

"Yeah, that's all I need, now."

The idea had me in its clutches already. I could see the news-stories, read the publicity blurbs. "Thanks, Captain," I said to McNeil. "I'll see that you get credit for this in the main title."

"Credit for what?"

"For the story of this guy's—what's his name, Gregory Sarco?—life. I'm going to get it."

McNeil stared at me. "You mean you're going to sleuth out this rat's own real life story?"

"Don't you think it's a great idea?"

He wasn't smiling. "A foolish idea, perhaps, Mr. Henderson."

"I don't get it," I protested. "The guy's dead, isn't he? What can I lose?"

He seemed to be weighing his words before he spoke them. "Well, now, I don't say it's likely, Mr. Henderson, but it's possible—just possible. You might lose your life."

McNEIL's file on Sarco got me nowhere except into blind alleys, and short ones at that. The man appeared to have been an almost legendary figure in international criminal circles—particularly slimy circles. When a big deal in drugs, women or munitions was turned up, there were almost invariably indications that Gregory Sarco was involved. But, no evidence a court would admit.

The New York bank which issued the passbook was no help at all. I was getting pretty discouraged at the end of a week, and about ready to admit I was a fool and quit. I stood in the corridor outside my hotel room the fifth night after my talk with McNeil, fumbling for the key and planning my return to Hollywood.

I stood in the open doorway and turned on the light in the room.

"Would you mind closing the door?"

I leaped like a wounded buck. The man lounging in the armchair was a razor-lean person whose clothes seemed to dangle from his body. Bushy eyebrows dominated a thin, honed-off face. The voice I had just heard was all out of keeping with its owner—as full, deep and rich as he was spare and wasted.

For some reason, I thought of quartets—male persuasion. Nature was in a prankish mood when she fashioned tenors and basses. According to my observation, tenors run to avoirdupois, basses to Adam's apples. You look at and you listen to a quartet, four voices blended like

good bourbon, and automatically you pick the fat guy for the bass. Then he takes a solo passage—and his voice is like sauterne, thin and golden. Then, on the other end, the boy with a lump on his throat gives out like rich, thick rum, and you're always surprised.

It was like that with my visitor.

"How do you do," I began. Then I saw the gun, held carelessly in one fleshless hand, but pointed at me, all the same. "Say, what's the big idea . . . ? Are you threatening me?"

The man smiled in a melancholy way. "I regret it, Mr. Henderson—I deeply regret it. But I cannot deny it. Sit down Mr. Henderson. We are going to have a quiet talk—about Gregory Sarco."

I sat down.

"If you'll pardon a B picture expression," I said, "just what's your racket?"

"I'll ask the questions for the moment, Mr. Henderson. Now. Suppose you tell me, what's *your* interest in Sarco?"

I began to get sore at the guy. "This is a lot of stupid melodrama! I could write a better villain than you in a three-day quickie."

The bushy eyebrows went up. "I don't doubt it, Mr. Henderson. I admire your screen villains. But I have one advantage over them. My gun is loaded, and there is no camera grinding just off-scene, is there?"

"If it's any business of yours," I said, "my interest in Sarco is simple curiosity. A cop named McNeil showed me Sarco's body, I looked at

his criminal record—"

"Yes, I know all that."

"Well, if you know so much, what do you want from me?"

One bloodless hand caressed his lantern jaw. "My own interest in all this is very sordid, I fear. A small matter of money—fifty thousand dollars."

"Tidy little sum," I quipped.

"Half of it could be yours, Mr. Henderson."

"You'll pardon me," I said sarcastically, "If I don't jump at your handsome offer, Mr. . . ."

"Edwards, Mr. Henderson. Just call me Mr. Edwards."

"Why not Smith, or Brown?"

He smiled and showed a set of huge, yellowed teeth. "Why, not, indeed? But I like 'Edwards'. Well, Mr. Henderson, I know money doesn't tempt you. But perhaps, if I put you in the way of getting some of the information you have wanted on Sarco, you would reciprocate with a little something *I* should like to know." He pulled a slip of paper from his pocket. "Here are names—and addresses—of people who might give you some rather special information on Gregory Sarco."

I let it lie where he put it on the table. "What's the catch? What do *you* want?"

He stood up, like a jack-knife opening. "Come and see me—I have written down that address, too—when you have talked with these people. Goodnight, then, Mr. Henderson—and good hunting."

THAT WAS the time to quit, and go back to making dreamed-up thrillers. I remembered all over again what McNeil had said that day, in the morgue. And I went up the river to Sing Sing, just the same, to visit a lifer whose name was at the top of Edwards' list.

When the guy heard Sarco was dead, he opened up.

"Yeah, we had one little deal together. He helped me in some business with Senator O'Malley—chairman of the Foreign Affairs committee during the disarmament conferences after World War I—remember?"

I remembered. "That was in 1927, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"Was that the year you and Sarco had your business with him?"

"Yeah."

"That was the same year the Senator was assassinated."

"Yeah. Quite a coincidence, that. Quite a coincidence."

There was the woman I found huddled over a whiskey-glass in a Bowery dive. When I told her Sarco was dead, she looked at me a long time out of mashed-egg eyes.

"I hope he didn't die easy." Her voice was as stagnant as her drink.

"I don't think he did," I said.

"Maybe there's some justice, at that."

"Are you very sure he was a drug addict?" I asked her.

Her laugh was like broken glass. "Where do you think I learned to take the stuff—in a convent?"

And there was the manager of a third-rate Brooklyn night spot, a patent-leather character named Coletti. His ferrety black eyes flamed for a single swift instant when I told him I had seen Sarco's body. "Maybe some of his mob's left around—how would I know? There's one guy might talk—I never seen him myself, but everybody useta talk about him—Eddie the Greek, they called him. There was a junk dealer named Kaminsky over by Triborough Bridge they said was a contact—say, was Sarco's body beat up some, huh?"

Kaminsky was in rolled-up shirt sleeves, with his feet on a desk that was littered with automobile parts. A generator lay on one corner, jostled by a distributor head, a crankshaft, a rusty piston, and a half-dozen piston rods with bearings that needed re-Babbitting.

"Vell?" he said, as if he didn't give a damn whether I came in or not.

"Coletti sent me," I said.

"Vell?"

"He said maybe you could tell me something about Eddie the Greek."

Kaminsky looked me over. His burnished brown eyes didn't miss a trick; they took in my open collar, two-toned jacket, fawn-colored whipcords, black-and-cream oxfords. He said nothing.

"He's dead," I said.

Kaminsky took his feet off the desk and leaned forward.

"Vell!"

This was distilled joy, with gleam-

ing teeth.

"Shot in the back."

Kaminsky's grin widened. He rubbed grimy hands together.

"Coletti said you might give me some background on the guy, who he was, where he came from, and so on."

Kaminsky shrugged.

"Ve-ell," he said, in two syllables.

His eyes flattened. It was suddenly obvious I would get nothing out of Kaminsky. As I stood making up my mind what to do next, Kaminsky got fatly to his feet and shuffled to the rear entrance of the little office.

With one hand on the grimy curtain, he turned the brown eyes on me for a last cryptic look. Then the curtain swung across the opening behind him.

I felt silly standing in someone else's empty office. I got out.

A WEEK later, when I knocked at the door of the shabby apartment that was the address Edwards had given as his own, I was feeling a little smug. I was sure of at least one thing, by now.

Somehow it was a surprise when Edwards himself opened the door. It was a dreary, two-room place with an entrance-hall, and worn spots in the carpet. Edwards loomed over me in the doorway, like a parchment-covered skeleton. He held a newspaper in one hand, like any other householder answering the door of an evening.

"Come in, Mr. Henderson," he boomed heartily. "Come in! I've been expecting you. Sit down, sit down!"

I sat down on a dining-room chair and he encased his bones in a soft armchair. "Well," he said, in his measured, musical tones, "it all turned out rather well, from your point of view, didn't it?"

"Not badly," I said. "But now..."

"But now there are still a few pieces of the picture missing, eh? You see, that was what I anticipated, why I dared hope you would come back to see me."

"What about Eddie the Greek?" I slapped the question at him without warning. He didn't twitch a muscle.

"Ah, yes . . . Eddie the Greek, Mr. Henderson."

"I hope you won't be shocked if I tell you I have a strong impression that 'Eddie the Greek' is one of your own pseudonyms, Mr.—Edwards."

"Very good, Mr. Henderson, very good indeed. Yes, I have been called that on occasion."

"Look," I said. "What's the idea of the wild goose chase? I've been all over Greater New York and parts of Connecticut, on your say-so, trying to find out something about Gregory Sarco, and it turns out you're the guy who's supposed to know more about him than anyone else. Come on, give!"

"In good time, Mr. Henderson. At the moment, there is a more pressing matter—a matter of some fifty thousand dollars. You recall

it?"

"I don't need money. I earn plenty."

"Did I say 'earn'? No, no, Mr. Henderson. With the information *you* possess, joined to the information *I* possess, there is a very liberal and sensible gentleman of my acquaintance who will *give* us fifty thousand dollars."

"Blackmail, in other words?" I laughed. "No thanks, Mr. Edwards, I'm taking a miss."

"But suppose——" he paused, and lifted one flaring eyebrow quizzically at me, "——suppose it meant your missing information on Sarco?"

"How do I know you've got this wonderful piece of information?"

Grinning at me, he pulled out a drawer in the desk at his elbow and took out a photograph. "This is it." He came across the room to me, and I stood up. "Look at this, Mr. Henderson, but first——" he held a bony hand across the upper section of the picture as he spoke "——read what is written across the bottom."

I read the writing: "To my good friend Gregory Sarco, from Count Orlando Monteserro."

"You recognize the name?"

"Of course."

Monteserro was a sprig of Spanish nobility who'd been in the dispatches from Argentina in recent years. There'd been ugly reports of his Nazi and Fascist connections there during and since the war.

"And now," said Edwards, "the face!" He lifted his hand from

the photo, and my heart did a double backflip.

"That's Sarco!" I bleated.

"Let us say," said Edwards smoothly, "it is the face of the man whose body you saw in company with Captain McNeil. Are you positive?"

"Of course I'm positive. I'd recognize it anywhere."

"Would you be so good as to write a few words to that effect across the face of the picture, and sign it?"

"Why?"

"Because I must be sure. And even on our brief acquaintance, Mr. Henderson, I am sure you would never write anything over your signature that was not true."

I thought fast. The face in the picture unquestionably was the face I had seen on the morgue slab. I'd have testified to it in court. In that case, Sarco was not dead . . .

I took my fountain-pen, wrote a few words on the picture and handed it to Edwards.

His face beamed, if such a face can beam.

"Now," I said, "where's Sarco? The real Sarco?"

Edwards tucked the photo into the desk and carelessly closed the drawer. He sank into the chair again before he answered.

"Here in New York. And very much alive."

"I want to meet him."

"You think you may get something that will make a motion picture story, Mr. Henderson?"

"Maybe."

I thought, this is how a detective, a real detective, feels when the trail begins to grow hot and he knows the case is close to a solution. "I want to meet Sarco," I said. "I've fulfilled my part of the bargain."

"Oh, you will meet him, Mr. Henderson, and soon. I will get in touch with you at your hotel. Possibly before tomorrow evening."

I practically had a rough script written in my mind while I hung around the lobby of my hotel, next day, waiting. I thought of the boys out in Hollywood, too—how their jaws would sag when I gave them the story line on my new picture and then casually revealed that I, Frank Henderson, not only would direct the opus but had been a major character in the real-life thriller . . . ! I could imagine Publicity's delighted whoops, as they sank their teeth into that one . . .

Edwards' message, when it came, was in the form of a registered letter, mailed that morning. It contained simply the name of an obscure hotel in the East Fifties, a room-number, and a time—eight-thirty p.m. that very evening.

When I tapped on the door-panel, it opened almost instantly. Edwards' saturnine, fleshless physiognomy loomed over me. "Come in, come in, Mr. Henderson." He closed the door carefully behind me as I entered, and stood with his back to it. "Not nervous, are you?"

"Aren't you?"

He shrugged bony shoulders. "A little, yes, I must confess. Our visitor

this evening is not what you might call an—easy-going man. But," and he made a deprecating gesture, "I have made a few simple arrangements. We will not be murdered, and we will not be followed—at least, not successfully."

"Followed where?" I wanted to know that, and quickly.

"To my little apartment where you met me. It's the safest place in all New York."

I took a seat, lit a cigarette and relaxed, outwardly, anyway. I resented Edwards' smooth, sardonic ways. He'd see that Frank Henderson was as cool as he. And even Edwards admitted to being nervous, despite his "arrangements".

"I hope your apartment is all you say," I said, blandly.

He slanted an odd look at me from under the grizzled brows.

"You know, Mr. Henderson, sometimes I fear that you may think I have not been as honest with you in this whole business as I might . . ."

"There *are* one or two little items, aren't there?" I agreed. "Your own connection with Sarco, for example."

"Naturally . . . but I honestly believe——"

He broke off and sat in tense immobility, his erstwhile easy assurance vanished.

We could both hear the muffled footsteps approaching along the carpeted hallway, nearing the door of our room. They stopped in front of the door.

Edwards' voice was a thin, harsh whisper. "Stand over by that door,

Mr. Henderson!"

His gun was in his right hand; the white areas over his bony knuckles told their own story. He saw my eyes on the blunt, ugly weapon.

"No shooting," he whispered. "Just—in case."

There were three knocks on the thin wooden panel.

"You may open the door, Mr. Henderson," Edwards sibilated. "Come in!" he said, in his natural, unctuous tones.

The door opened, and Captain McNeil stepped into the room. "Good evening, gentlemen," he said pleasantly. My face must have been a collector's item, for he added, "Surprised to see me?"

"Naturally." It was Edwards speaking. I was incapable of formulating intelligent thought, for a swift second or two.

McNeil appeared to be savoring the entire situation as a gourmet savors an Olympia oyster. "When an appointment has been carefully arranged for Mr. Henderson to meet the arch-criminal Sarco, and that arch-criminal turns out to be none other than the illustrious Captain McNeil . . . naturally . . ."

McNeil's hand reached for a pocket. A sharp syllable from Edwards arrested the gesture.

"I was reaching for a cigarette." McNeil seemed amused.

"Allow me, Captain." Edwards tendered a pack, flipped a lighter with his free hand. McNeil blew out smoke.

"I was about to say, I sort of wondered how it happened that I find you doing a part in this little drama, Mr. Henderson. Now I know."

"You know more than I know, then," I said bluntly.

"You can bet on that." He was completely at ease, this McNeil. "For example, I know that I'm not Sarco. I also know that your—confederate, Mr. Edwards is Sarco. Does that help?"

"Plenty," I said bitterly. "See here, I don't believe there is a Sarco. Someone has invented the guy. Don't ask me why!"

Edwards was grinning impartially at McNeil and myself, displaying his huge, square teeth and several acres of gum. "I am truly sorry, Mr. Henderson," he said, without a trace of contrition in his tone, "truly sorry. It seems my fate to be forced from one deception to another."

"Stop talking like a high-priced undertaker and answer one question," I growled. "Are you Sarco?"

"I'm afraid I am—yes. You see—Captain McNeil would scarcely have acceded to my—request, had he not feared that a third, highly respectable party was also privy to our little secret. After all, there would be ways of dealing with Gregory Sarco, but a well-known motion-picture director—that would be another story. Yes, indeed."

"What secret?" I yelled.

"The secret of who shot Count Orlando Monteserro, a prominent citizen of a friendly nation, in the

back, in Central Park." Edwards smiled gently. "It would rather blast that notable career of yours, wouldn't it, Captain, probably create international complications—besides earning you a possible life-time berth in Sing Sing? By the way, you have the money with you?"

"I have." McNeil was unemotional about it.

"How convenient to deal with a police official who happens also to have a large private fortune," murmured Edwards. His eyes gleamed, as McNeil laid a thick bundle of notes on the writing-desk. I read the numeral "1000" on the top bill.

"Don't you want to count it?" inquired McNeil.

"I can see it well enough," snapped Edwards. "Goodbye, now, Captain. Our business is concluded, I think." He had become suddenly brisk.

"See here," I broke in, "if you think I'm going to play cat's-paw for you, Edwards, on a stinking deal like this . . ."

He chuckled. "Ah, ah, Mr. Henderson. Don't forget, I've got your signature on that photo of the man the good Captain killed—mistakenly of course . . ."

McNeil swiveled an eye onto me. "You can see now, Mr. Henderson, where you fit into the picture, and not a very pretty picture, either." He shook his head, a wry half-twist to his mouth. "If I'd only resisted the temptation to play the Famous Special Agent for you that night, Henderson, and never shown you

that body!"

I felt like a heel, and a helpless heel.

"Damn it, McNeil! I'm not going to stand still for this! What's to stop me telling my story and letting a court—"

"This," Edwards was still smiling, but he'd crossed the room in two strides of his scarecrow legs; the automatic was against my left side. "This—and the fact that if Captain McNeil thought that you might talk, it would be distinctly in *his* interest to see that you didn't. After all, a man is dead, a prominent man, guilty of no proven crime, and dead at the hands of a reputable officer of the law."

"You see." McNeil spread his hands. He looked at Sarco. "Maybe we'll meet again, someday. In Central Park—or elsewhere."

Edwards shrugged. "Perhaps—who knows. You'd better go, now, Captain."

I shrugged, too. "Okay, so that's it. So I've been had."

I picked up McNeil's hat, bowed low and held it out to him.

"Your hat, Captain. *Salud y pesetas.*"

"I can use the *pesetas*, now."

Then he was gone.

I turned on Edwards. "So you're Sarco."

He bowed, and it was like a wind-mill bending. "You see now why it was impossible to tell you before, Mr. Henderson. I wanted to, believe me, if only because your interest in me was so flattering."

"McNeil will catch up with you, some day."

His laugh was amiable. "McNeil? It would be more logical for him to kill *you*, Mr. Henderson, than to kill me. With you dead, he would be completely free to attempt to deal with me."

"Just how," I asked, "did McNeil happen to kill Monteserro?"

"Very simple. I had had some dealings with the man. He was a Nazi agent, without a doubt. In any event, I had difficulties with the fellow. So, I persuaded him that if he would appear in New York, disguised as Gregory Sarco, he could secure some very valuable information. He was unwise enough to do this."

"And you tipped off McNeil that 'Sarco' was in town. Very clever, Edwards."

"Thank you." He bowed again, ironically. "And now, may I suggest that we return to my little flat?"

"Wait a minute," I said. "Where do you get that 'we' stuff?"

"From an inexhaustible source, Mr. Henderson." The automatic was in his hand again.

I wondered why it hadn't occurred to me to go armed in this business. Then it occurred to me further that I didn't even know how to release the safety-catch on a pistol.

"You win," I said.

He waived a spidery hand. "Under the circumstances, I think it would be safer—for both of us."

I thought of McNeil, out there somewhere minus fifty grand at the

hands of this complete scoundrel and—leave us face it—myself. I went along quietly. I was in this thing, now, whether I liked it or whether I didn't.

With the door of the little apartment shut behind us, Edwards—or Sarco—suddenly became the affable host. During the taxi ride from the hotel, he had kept his hand in the pocket with his gun. Now he appeared to relax. He mixed me a drink, and chuckled as he scanned my face when it was offered to me.

"No, it isn't," he said. Putting the glass to his lips he tipped a third of the highball down his own throat.

I was glad enough to have it. Sarco sank into his easy chair—he seemed to crave softness as a cushion for his bony body—and regarded me quizzically. I stared back. The situation didn't seem to call for anything special, conversationally. I was trying to figure the next move in our little game, anyway.

He broke the silence.

"Do you like your drink, Mr. Henderson?"

Without waiting for an answer, he took the automatic out of his pocket, and laid it carelessly on the arm of the chair.

"Yes," I said. "I wish you'd put that gun away."

He sighed. "You know, Mr. Henderson, I have been trying all evening to think of a way out of this dilemma. I have dealt very shabbily with you. I should have liked to spare you this last little decep-

tion . . ."

Picking up the gun, he snicked back the slide, shot it to again with a vicious smack of his palm.

Something cold that was not my highball tingled in my stomach.

"What—little deception . . .?"

"I am going to have to kill you, Mr. Henderson."

"Indeed."

I tried manfully to keep my voice as cool and matter-of-fact as his. I stole a look at my wrist-watch.

"May I finish my drink?" I said.

"But certainly." He smiled cordially and stood up. "I think I had better check the door." He moved toward the small entrance hall. "By the way, Mr. Henderson," he said over his shoulder, "it is useless to attempt to escape. This door is the only way out, and the windows are barred with steel shutters. One of my little precautions I mentioned." He disappeared into the hall.

I sat rigid in my chair, the drink in my hand.

Three roaring blasts from a pistol rocked the walls of the little apartment.

At the first shot, I was out of my chair and flat on the floor. In the succeeding dead silence, I cautiously got to my feet. I stepped out into the hall.

Gregory Sarco lay face down on the carpet, one long, thin leg doubled into his stomach.

Captain McNeil stood with his back to the outer door, hands in his pockets, looking calmly down at the body.

"I take it," he remarked coolly, "that someone has just liquidated our friend Sarco—or Edwards, as you prefer."

"Seems pretty obvious."

My voice rattled around in my throat like peas in a hopper.

"Did you see it happen?" McNeil was asking for information.

"No," I said. "I didn't." I was working my way back to normal. "Did you—have much trouble finding your way here?" I asked.

He seemed to have some private joke. "None at all. Mr. Henderson, I'm afraid I have a little confession to make."

"Let's forget about it—" I began.

"Let's not." His eyes twinkled. "You recall the matter of the information on the piece of paper slipped under the hat-band?"

I nodded.

"I apologize. A highly practical device."

I grinned, too. "Maybe I didn't make it clear enough in the picture that the paper was rolled into a hard little ball. I suppose it hurt your head when you put your hat on, tonight . . .?"

"It did, and I found the address of this place on it. That's really pulling the solution out of the hat, isn't it?"

"You'd make a fine detective, Mr. Henderson," he added. "How much have you known about this, all along?"

I tried not to sound smug. "For one thing, I was pretty sure the body I saw wasn't Sarco. The aspirin you

said you found on him was the tip-off, to me. A drug addict who takes the precaution of carrying aspirin would certainly carry his favorite dope, too. Remember, I used that in a picture once. **THE BLUE CANARY**."

"You did, at that! I should have remembered!"

"I want to get out of here," I told him. "What about the money—and the photograph."

"Don't let it worry you—the money and the picture are in good hands..."

"I kind of thought they were." I hesitated. "I suppose we can safely leave to the police force the question of *who* killed Sarco..."

He nodded slowly. "I think we can."

"If I knew who," I said, looking him in the eye, "I'd sort of like to thank him. Because he saved my life, you know."

McNeil was not smiling. "And if he knew you, he'd want to thank you, as well, because in a way, you saved *him*."

We shook hands.

Quite by accident, Producer William Spier has found a sure-fire way to break tension among the "Suspense" stars each Thursday over CBS. It's started by Engineer Bob Anderson, who shouts into the talk-back "mike"; "One minute to go — approximately that is!" And, just before the "go" signal flashes, he follows with "System two seconds early!"

Announcer Ken Niles, in an equally loud voice, retorts: "Don't worry, cast. We'll divide up the two seconds between us and finish on time."

In the general hilarity which follows, pre-broadcast nerves are forgotten and "Suspense" hits the CBS airlines with only the listeners on edge.



WHEN Gee-Gee, out-of-work chorus-girl, had her purse snatched on the subway, it was no great loss; there was only a nickel in it. But, when she got it back, ten minutes later, there was a huge roll of bills inside. Cause for joy? Not for Gee-Gee; three men wanted THE TEN GRAND in that bag, and murder stalked pitch-dark streets... DOUBLE ENTRY book-keeping is founded on the fact that, when you put something somewhere, you take it from somewhere. So Eddie Cleary took a grand out of the boss's till and put it on a horse; and complications multiplied like compound interest!... You kill a man and you get rid of his body; that is, everything except his head. You've still got an awkward problem. You can't just set it on a mantel and pass it off as a modernistic vase; you have to hide it in something. For example, in THE PASTEBOARD BOX... The blind man lived in A WORLD OF DARKNESS, but he saw more clearly than most with his ears, nose, hands—and heart. He saw who plunged a blade into the heart of gay little Nancy and none but he knew... Alibis ought to be FOOL-PROOF; any crook will tell you that; they shouldn't be cluttered with disembodied voices—and voiceless bodies. Just ask Henry Wilson... THE MAESTRO liked the fight game and he liked to gamble. So he gambled a life; oh, not his own, you can be sure. And prize-fighters are still talking about what happened, in OF MAESTRO AND MAN... THE BLACK SHAWL around the old lady's shoulders also shrouded one of Hollywood's strangest unsolved mysteries.

Read them all in the next issue of SUSPENSE, The Mystery Magazine.